

COLOS

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And the king lived happily ever after

By LEON HARRIS

Most modern fairy tales (and probably most ancient fairy tales now happily forgotten) are either arch, pretentious, tendentious or tedious—or some combination of these. Colos's THE STUDENT WHO BECAME KING IN SPITE OF HIMSELF (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$5.95), a retelling of an old Hungarian folk tale, is, in the language of the multiple-answer quiz, "none of the above." Instead it is exciting, suitably spare, moving and witty. Colos's illustrations are, if possible, even more delightfully surprising and wittier than his text.

As the title promises, this is the story of an impoverished student who by a combination of good luck and his own enterprise (neither of which is in oversupply in any land or life or time), becomes a happily married king. Like so many of the best fairy tales, it contains those seemingly inimical contradictions, fantasy and skepticism, terror and humor, selfish ambition and true love.

The illustrations, all collages in handsome color, contain a quite ex-

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traordinary variety of things from Victorian Valentine elements to modern French marble papers. The observant child will notice Colos has hidden Tenniel's Alice in Wonderland behind a tree and this is only one of many surprising recognitions, juxtapositions and contrasts—for like Madame de Stael, Colos knows wit is disclosing the resemblance of things that differ and the difference of things that are alike. One can scarcely conceive of more delicious proofs that modern art and ancient myth rather than being antithetic are, in the right hands, complementary.

Yeats, like Jung, recognized man's historical religious need for fairy tales. Even so devout a cynic as Byron yearned in his "Don Juan" to return to those fairy realms "Where I beheld what never was to be," and John Seiden observed that ours has not been a merry world since the fairies left off dancing and preachers left off exorcising. One hopes this book may be an omen of their return, and other writers must extend to Colos their admiration (in one reviewer's case not untouched by envy) for what Lewis Carroll called "the love-gift of a fairy tale."

20.10



Illustration by Coles for "The Student Who Became King in Spite of Himself."

